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AUTHOR Helwig, Carl
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AVAILABLE FROM Carl Helwig, Old Dominion Univ., Norfolk, Va 23508

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Author: Carl Helwig

Institution: Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Va. 23508

Abstract

In a declining role, the educational philosopher might be able to revive his own role through the current call for educational reform amidst America's latest "educational crisis." The educational issues raised by Illich, Silberman, Skinner and Muller are analyzed in detail for they provide the basis for such a revived role. Particularly, neo-behaviorism, and especially Skinnerianism, is seen as highly untenable and vulgar. Thus, the educational philosopher need not continue in his demise, but he must abandon his traditional objective neutrality toward educational issues and turn into a partisan advocate.

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MORALITY AND EDUCATIONAL CHANGE:

THE CURRENT RELEVANCE OF

THE CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHER

Carl Helwig

Old Dominion University

(A paper presented April 16, 1974 at the American Educational Research Association's annual meeting, Chicago, Illinois)

Colonial and nineteenth century America's unifying educational principle around the "common or democratic faith," observed Crawford and Brown, had never been clearly nor systematically formulated by American society nor by its educational establishment. The time had arrived, they further contended, for American education to develop through existentialist theory both a social as well as a personal morality, the former by American society itself, the latter by the individual.[1] However, this task did not seem to be a simple one: the contest between value, including the moral, on the one hand, and the power, including educator professional autonomy and community control over education on the other, said Tyack, often collided and currently nostalgic old-timers as well as sophisticated radicals alike called for the decentralization of schools and some form of participatory democracy over their control.[2]

Amidst such a current educational crisis, if it judiciously can be so recognized, stood America's intellectuals, a nebulous group whom George Wallace identified as ones who could not "even park their bicycles" or for Jacques Barzun "anyone who carried a briefcase." More definitively, however, Jill Conway, professor of American intellectual and social history at the University of Toronto, observed that America's intellectuals divided themselves into two classes" the strongly alienated unable to respond to the American "domestic sentiment" and the homeguard heavily steeped with the capitalistic ethos. The former became expatriates; the latter in the words of Santayana, "clergymen without a church."[3]

It was here, it seemed, that today's educational philosopher had a unique obligation to reassess America's so called "current educational crisis" and make his voice heard. And he had to do so ex cathedra for, according to Erwin, spiritual grace now seemed to be passing from the intellectuals to the moralists and the activists.[4] By provoking discussion about values, morality, and current educational change, the educational philosopher, furthermore, must neither be an expatriate nor a briefcase-carrying, churchless clergyman, but a partisan advocate. In the words of Lucas:

> Since provoking discussion is actually more important than analyzing it to death, the shibboleth of objective neutrality in philosophic matters needs to be abandoned. One would hope the philosopher of education is uniquely qualified to present a partisan position.[5]

As a result, I should like to invite the educational philosopher's attention to the following regarding the current educational crisis and the morality within its present value system.

Public and higher education in America had never in its last fifty years or so been without criticism as well as self-evaluation. The 1970-71 period had witnessed at least four full length books aimed at the "new crisis" in education, although education had been moving from one crisis to another since the era of progressivism, Sputnik I, and the most recent behavioral-existentialist debate. "The mood of 1971 is propitious," observed Ivan Illich in his Deschooling Society "for a major change of direction in search of a hopeful future. Institutional goals continuously contradict institutional products.... We can recognize universal schooling as a culmination of the Promethean enterprise, and speak about the alternative as a world fit to live in for Epimethean man."

Epimetheus? Afterthinker? The Greek mythological brother of Prometheus and husband of Pandora? What kind of modern man this? He was, said Illich, a man determined to discover anew the distinction between hope and expectation, Illich's educational revolution would abolish professional and institutional control of educational values; and his full deschooling of society would "blur the distinctions between economics, education, and politics." By deschooling American society and disfranchising its existing educational establishment, Illich's Epimethean man would be "hopeful man," calling upon American education only as he saw fit for his own private needs.

Illich's radical assessment for change suffered both from its methodological point of view as well as its insufficient radicalism, held Gintis.[6] First, Illich's methodology of total critique and negation with his incomplete analysis stemmed from Illich's choice through the dialectical, namely, that American society "as was" (thesis), entertained its own negation (antithesis), and overcame both in a radical reconceptualization of its own educational establishment (synthesis). With this type of negation, asserted Gintis, the American conceptions of the Good Life--consumption and education, the welfare state and corporate manipulation--were demystified and laid "bare in the light of critical, negative though." However, Illich stopped short of total radicalization, Gintis also argued: the necessary ingredients for total educational change lay in political radicalization in which the social relations of education were altered through "genuine struggle," including the mechanisms of power and privilege in the American economic sphere.

And how did Gintis justify this? From America's change from an agricultural to an industral society, the "conflict of economic interests eventually culminated in the functional reorientation of the educational system to new labor force compatible with its factory system by drawing from a predominantly agricultural populace. Later, a second educational crisis resulted from the economy's need to import peasant European labor. The latter's social relations with production and ethnic cultures were incompatible with industrial wage-labor theory. With these two crises, America resolved the problem by creating its current hierarchical centralized system corresponding to the ascendance of corporate production. Therefore, argued Gintis, even today employers hired in relation to capitalistic production, that is, they paid most willingly for certain affective traits possessed by their future employees, namely, personality traits attitudes, and modes of self-preservation. All these, of course, were also educationally related traits and the established cultural relationship between capitalistic education and production was there. "Just as workers are alienated from both the process and the product of their work activities and must be rewarded by the external reward of pay and hierarchical status," said Gintis, "so the student learns to operate efficiently through the external reward of grades and promotion, effectively alienated from the process of education, learning, and its product, knowledge."[7]

While both Illich and Gintis wanted to deemphasize the mass, formal structure of education to America's economy, Charles E. Silberman in Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education claimed the current educational crisis was not how to increase the efficiency of the schools; rather it was how to create and maintain a humane society. "A society whose schools are inhumane, "observed Silberman, "is not likely to be humane itself." Education as a full-blown enterprise should continue, he said, but its "humanization" could be best achieved through greater informalization. Silberman found support for his thesis, among others, in Dewey, Piaget, Montessori, Bruner, Goodman and Goodlad. At times, it was difficult to see the new in Silberman's thinking with his reliance on educational thought of the past: humanization, like motherhood, is a near noncontroversial issue and Silberman's book better met the test for a thorough assessment of current educational practices within the school rather than a proposal for a radical change in the total American educational enterprise, despite his assertions to the contrary.

Probably more heat has been generated by Skinner in his Beyond Freedom and Dignity than the words of Illich or Silberman. Both the literatures of freedom and dignity, said Skinner, rallied around too much individualism: "Man's struggle for his freedom is not due to a will to be free, but to certain behavioral processes characteristic of the human organism, the chief effect of which is the avoidance of, or escape from so-called adversive features of the environment." In a like manner, the concern for individual man's dignity "opposes advances in technology, including a technology of behavior, because they destroy chances to be admired and a basic analysis because it offers an alternative explanation of behavior for which the individual himself has previously been given credit." Skinner's call was not for Illich's Epimethean man, but for a man who could control his environment and manipulate it scientifically to his own choosing.

Skinner naturally would not be without his critics. Arthur Toynbee noted that man's own self-determination was also a causative factor in human behavior in addition to Skinner's heavy emphasis on environment. Noting Skinner's rather ambiguous use of his proposed man's self-control, Toynbee sensed an incompatability in Skinner's own thesis, namely, that some, not all the participants in Skinner's new society would design cultural practices, create cultural environments, and thus control the behavior of others. Then contrary to Skinner's assertion freedom to act by man was not a delusion; on the contrary, a human being could exercise initiative and thus his behavior was not determined wholly by genetic endowment and social setting.

To the contrary, retorted Skinner, freedom to the present had become a convenient watch-word applied against tyranny and elitism, the latter causing some to control others by negative reinforcement and punishment. Humanity no longer could afford autonomous man for besides this delusory freedom, his acknowledged individual dignity had been no more than society's method of praising him for his acts of generosity, courage, and self-sacrifice with the simultaneous threats of pressure and punishment.[8]

Skinner's rather coherent statement about the relationship between man and society was a masterpiece for the basic thesis in Beyond Freedom and Dignity rested on experiment rather than philosophy or introspection, claimed Platt. He further noted Skinner's advocacy of a behavioral-evolutionary basis for ethics and the teaching of moral values.[9] Accordingly, first, ethics became ineffective unless it included actual behavioral as well as valuing practices.

These had to come by the conscious and deliberate shaping of the behavioral education of the young. Second, ethics had meaning only within the framework of its ultimate contribution to the longer-run and larger-scale survival of the biological system surrounding man and his culture.[10]

Nevertheless, the behaviorist's own behaviorism, did not completely license him to choose among several alternative behavioral specifications whenever there was more than one way to specify, and thus to operationalize, a behavioral concept. Of equal, if not greater importance, was the fact that the behaviorist could not justify his selection of an educational objective stated in behavioristic as opposed to one stated in non-behavioristic terms, Certainly, this crucial decision had to represent a choice other than the behaviorist's own behaviorism. Frequently, this decision amounted to no more than a silly notion to define an educational objective in behavioristic terms by introducing an activity verb. For example, the non-behaviorally stated educational objective "to have the pupil understand modern poetry" altered to the behaviorally-stated "to have the pupil write a critical essay on modern poetry" did not in and of itself clinch the ultimate wisdom of the behaviorist's own decision. In the end, let the educational philosopher recognize the near meaninglessness of such concepts as "behaviorism" and "behavioristic educational objectives." They allude to virtually nothing as do such other familiar educational homilies as "to educate the whole child" and "to teach children, not subject matter."

Thus, argued the behaviorist, including Skinner other human beings, other than the behaviorist himself had no option whatever on choice and selection; these, too, were manifestations of genetics and environment and not a free will manifestation of a self. The absolutism of genetics and environment on man's behavior included even his creativity, said Skinner. The poet, for example, could no more take credit for the poem he "created" than a goose capable of laying a golden egg. Why? Because, certain genetic and environmental forces merged at a certain time in a certain locus to produce the poem. Although unlike the mother with her child, the poet did have access of his poem during its gestation and he could tinker with it, modify it, and thus compose it, nevertheless, the poem itself also came ultimately from genetic and environmental forces--this time from the poets own past history, verbal and otherwise. "Having a poem," summarized Skinner, "like having a baby is in large part a matter of exploration and discovery, and both poet and mother are often surprised by what they produce." In essence, new life forms were created by the contingencies of survival and selection of the fittest through survival became a special kind of causality. This consequently denied any form of creative contribution by any individual human being and his so-called creative individuality had to be explained as a product of his previous genetic and environmental history. The furor this theory created, held Skinner, thus threatened the poet's autonomy for it, like other autonomies, argued in terms of individual dignity and freedom, and thus it was to conceive it as the uncaused. To wait, for a genius or a genie was to make a "virtue of ignorance" and, at the same time, to ignore genetics and environment in biological explanation.[12]

Thus in the current era of neo-behaviorism appeared a new wizard, the shaman of scienticism. He had three distinguishing characteristics, said Malachi.[13] First, he had to be a scientist; second, to proceed from scientist to scientian--an achievement of the few--he had to extrapolate the currently known data of his field--and, if necessary, the data of other branches of science--in order to discourse on the whole of man, including specifically, ethics, morality,

humanism, and religious instinct--all the so-called "inner things of man." Third, the scientian's extrapolations led him to courch for an evil, reality in man's world, while for Skinner became "the cast-iron effect of environment on human behavior and the nefarious literatures of freedom and dignity (by which Skinner seemed eventually to mean all literature except the literature of behaviorism)+constituted the evil of man's condition."[14]

Less controversial than Skinner, Muller In Pursuit of Relevance (1971) addressed himself to young people in their quest for new values and life styles more satisfying to their own self-realization and self-expression. Muller touched on a myraid of subject areas--the relevance of the humanities, the uses and abuses of history--but specifically concerned himself to the issue of what it was that made education relevant. The decent society, he maintained, allowed for free inquiry, criticism, and peaceful dissent and the traditional cardinal virtues of tolerance and civility become educational ends in themselves. Muller's call for the new educated was the man of vision, educated to realize that power did not derive from possession, privilege or circumstance, but rather was rooted in "love, reflectiveness, reason, and creativity."[15]

Through perhaps a too lengthy review, I think that I have touched on the principal points of call for educational change in America and the forces which seek to achieve such a change. The principal forces, especially in current educational thought, of course, are the educational libertarians, such as Illich and Silberman, and Skinner and his neo-behaviorist followers. Neither group, it seemed, had assessed the true nature of the demand for educational change except perhaps Müller. Here is then, where the educational philosopher, as a partisan to his own advocacy, must add the finishing touches to an incomplete picture.

As an intellectual, he, first, must realize that tension as well as ambivalence have characterized throughout history the relations between intellectuals on the one hand, and those in power and authority, on the other. This ambivalence and tension can be explained by the intellectual's role specializations as well as his common participation with political authorities in both the symbolic and organizational aspects in the institutionalization of cultural tradition.[16] As a result, among the philosophers, the educational philosopher is in no position to state concrete "aims" or "objectives" for education, although he frequently is expected to do so. "It is as though the educational philosopher," observed Waks, "is both a hedgehog and a fox; he knows one big thing and many little things. He knows the will of God, or the nature of things, and from this he in some deduces the aim of teaching seventh year math."[17]

Rather than be concerned with such behavioristic nonsense, the educational philosopher's principal concern must become the new morality and its impracts upon current educational change.

Observed Gustafson in this respect:

> The fear whether (from) an unjust God, a harsh father or king, or a life of want unless one worked terribly hard which underlaid the old morality is no longer a large part of life in America. But the need for some morality is with us still. Moral autonomy, the independent arrival at a conviction of one's own accountability toward one's fellow man, the rational and emotional acceptance of justice as the most proper atmosphere in which all individuals can flourish, including one's own secret self--this is the new morality toward which we are to guide ourselves and other people.[18]

With America's present age of materialistic aplenty, the old adage that "if you do not work hard at school, you will starve or become a common workman" has now shifted to "if you do not work hard at school and if you do not acquire the will power to keep up the habit through life, you will be bored and unhappy." Such a newly-acquired habit for a first principle in life, held Gabor, must be inculcated in youth at an early age for only the few exceptional learned without effort.[19] Moreover, because postwar youth now was non-ascetic, antitechnological, anti-academic, non-violent, and highly participatory within its own peer groups, the educational setting for the new morality seemed to have shifted from the formal classroom atmosphere to an informal personalistic life style with a high degree of self-identification with youth's own generation.[20]

Thus, even the plea by Schmitz for the acknowledgment in moral value of a "proper or legitimate authority" can be perceived as having in today's excessive, youthful individualism a highly subjective ingredient if the new permissiveness in life style demands that an individual's own view of the world be entirely on his own basis rather than any form of collective consensus whatever.[21] Examined in this light, the educational philosopher might readily note that the young view their situation as either hopelessly deterministic or compulsively free. The first led to deep cynicism; the second, to an implusive, if not almost compulsive, resistance or affirmation. If either effort, said Palmer, led to a head-on assault to seek change, then it would be identified 1 as a compulsive act of free will, a rather feeble means through which to create a realignment of individual experience.[22]

In conclusion, then, how does the educational philosopher become a partisan advocate in relation to the new morality? Probably by reaffirming that which the educational libertarians and the neo-behavioristis cited in this study have either overlooked or failed to emphasize or, in fact, were incapable because of their behavioristic myopia to even challenge. In this respect, I would rather quote Muller than convey the idea that this was a personal, intuitive proposal of my own for I would rather have the external evidence speak for itself. Said Muller:

> My thesis is that the most important contribution the humanities (and this included the educational philosopher) could make to education for the future is a basic study of the problems of human values and human judgments that students are not trained to make in the social and behavioral sciences, whose approved methodologies do not lend themselves to such purposes, but rather support the common illusion that true science is value free as well as judgments that call for more knowledge of the past than up-to-date scientists usually have.[23]

We need not, therefore, witness the demise of the educational philosopher nor allow for his replacement by the scientian, such as Skinner, but he must rather rapidly, I think, abandon any position of objective neutrality and become an advocate to the new morality; namely, the new life style with its demands for educational change.

Footnotes

1. A.B. Crawford and W.R. Brown "Missing: A Viable Aim for American Education," Educational Theory 21:5 (Fall 1971), 407-417, passim.

2. D.B. Tyack, "The Tribe and the Common School: Community Control in Rural Education," American Quarterly 24:1 (March, 1972), 19.

3. J. Conway, "Intellectuals in America: Varieties of Accomodation and Conflict," Daedalus (Summer, 1972), 205.

4. R. Erwin, "The Eclipse of the Intellectual Hero," Virginia Quarterly Review (Summer, 1972), 204.

5. C. J. Lucas, "The Demise of Educational Philosophy," School Review 79:2 (February, 1971), 276. For an attack on Lucas, see J. E. McClellan, "Educational Philosophy Resurrected," ibid, 278-281. See also H. Kohl's "What Are the Real Risks When Schools Try to Change?", Saturday Review, May 27, 1972, 48-54.

6. H. Gintis, "Toward a Political Economy of Education: A Radical Critique of Ivan Illich's Deschooling Society," Harvard Educational Review 42:1 (February 1972), 87-96, passim.

   Several other recent sources related to educational change are introduced here for bibliographical purposes with annotation. They all have overtones of futility in any planned educational intervention.

   P. Jansen, "OEO As an Innovator," Saturday Review (February 5, 1972), 40-43. In a $300,000 contract from HEW, the Rand Corporation gave OEO "high marks as an educational change, agent but low marks for mean gains on standardized tests" for its first year of performance contracting.

   T. Husin, "Does More Time in School Make A Difference?," Saturday Review (April 29, 1972), 32-35. The increase in the formal schooling period did not yield a corresponding increase in student achievement, despite this prevailing false pedagogical form of educational folklore.

   "Result of a Test: F," Time. February 14, 1972. OEO spent $7.2 dollars to study the effects of performance contracting for the 1970-71 school year. The title provides the answer.

   B. W. Bloom, "Innocence in Education," School Review 80:3 (May, 1972), 333-352. On some factors or explanations of how educators themselves might be erring in affecting educational changes with social outcomes, see this article.

   For two explanations as to why current teachers might prove to be a functional as change agents, see H. Zeigler, The Political Life of the American Teacher. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967. "Far from being a mechanism through which the system might be changed, teachers associations function as agents for the preservation of the status quo," Also see, S.W. Reitman, "Role Strain and the American Teacher," School Review 97:4 (August, 1971), 543-560.

7. C.E. Silberman, Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Society. New York: Random House, 1970.

8. B.F. Skinner, Beyond Freedom and Dignity. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971; A. Toynbee, "Beyond Freedom and Dignity: An Uneasy Feeling of Reality." The Center Magazine 5:2 (March-April, 1972), 61. For another anti-Skinnerian article, see M. Black, "Beyond Freedom and Dignity: A Disservice to All," ibid., 53-58.

9. J. Platt, "A Revolutionary Manifesto in Beyond Freedom and Dignity," The Center Magazine 5:2 (March-April, 1972), 33-65, passim.

10. For a counter-argument to Platt, see A. Etzioni, "Human Beings Are Not Easy to Change After All," Saturday Review, June 3, 1972, 45-47, passim.

11. I.S. Steinberg, "Behavioral Definition of Educational Objectives" in Philosophical Redirection of Educational Research, Seventy-first Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972, p. 160.

12. B. F. Skinner, "On Having a Poem," Saturday Review, July 15, 1972, 32-35, passim.

. On how sensitivity to contranies could be a principal clue to the identification of genius in scientific pursuit, see G. Holton, "On Trying to Understand Scientific Genius," American Scholar 41:1 (Winter, 1971-72), 95-110.

The educational emphasis on convergent (and thus consensual) rather than divergent thinking seems to have little tolerance for disagreers." Thus the behaviorists with their concept of "self-control" would, too, tend to level off divergence of thought with their "operant conditioning" proposals. A new term in behavioristic jargon in this respect is "behavior modification."

13. M. Malachi, "The Scientist as Shaman," Harper's, March, 1972, 54-61, passim.

14. ibid., 56.

15. H. J. Muller, In Pursuit of Relevance. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1971.

16. S. N. Eisenstadt, "Intellectuals and Tradition," Daedalus, Spring, 1972, 9.

17. L. J. Waks, "Philosophy, Education, and the Doomsday Threat," Review of Educational Research, December, 1969, 615-618, passim.

18. J. M. Gustafson and others, Moral Education. Cambridge, Massachussetts. Harvard University Press, 1970, p. 4.

19. G. Dennis, "Fighting Existential Nausea," Technology and Human Values. An occasional paper. Santa Barbara, Calif.: Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1966, 15. On some demands by students on the university, see Students and Society, 1967, another occasional paper.

20. K. Keniston, "Youth and Violence: The Contexts of Moral Crisis" in Moral Education cited in footnote 18 above.

21. A. O. Schmitz, "The Humanities and Proper Authority," Proceedings of South Atlantic Philosophy of Education Society, Furman University, Greenville, S. C. October 22-23, 1971, page 92.

22. R. B. Palmer, "Sophocles, Compulsive Free Will, and the Current Crisis of Values," Virginia Quarterly Review 48:3 (Summer, 1972), 441.

My synthesis of the ideas gathered from Eisenstadt through Palmer above was heavily influenced by G. C. Stern, "Self-Actualizing Environments for Students," School Review 80:1 (November, 1971), 1-26. Briefly, Stern found no evidence that one type of learning environment was more appropriate for one type of student over another type. Rather, from an analysis of a variety of different educational settings, only one set of parameters emerged, that is, our current insitutions of higher learning, at least, have either succeeded in one way or another in optimizing human development or, on the other hand, educating in such a way as to preserve the existing educational structure within the institution. Hence, I thought, I might as well examine in my own research effort what societal educational changes were occurring or needed to occur within the educative process if the current life-style demanded "actualization" of and by the self.

23. H. J. Muller, "Education for the Future," American Scholar 41:3 (Summer, 1972), 377-388, passim.